

“This is a great opportunity to integrate echelons-above-division units with our training. The 502<sup>nd</sup> supporting us here today is the same outstanding unit that bridged the Sava River when Task Force Eagle deployed to Joint Endeavor in December 1995,” said Young.

Another unit providing support to the operation was the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division’s own air defense artillery unit, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Air Defense Artillery Regiment.

A team from the 1-4 ADA battalion guarded the skies up to 10 kilometers high over the crossing site from hostile attack with their Avenger air defense system.

“The Avenger can range targets out to 10 kilometers with its Forward-Looking Infrared Range or ‘FLIR’ system. It can also shoot on the move or in position,” explained Pfc. Jered D. Wickman, an Avenger gunner conducting air defense operations at the river site.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division leaders learned that river crossing is a multi-phased event. Before building the bridge, the engineers first construct rafts to ferry equipment across the river, equipment needed to fight any enemy still on the far shore.

“The most critical part of a bridging operation is the rafting phase,” explained Cpt. Sean D.

Egan, commander of the 502<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Company. “That’s the phase where you’re rafting your combat power across to secure the far side. Once that’s accomplished, then the area is secure enough to begin actual bridging operations.”

Another challenge the engineers might face is the site conditions at the river. If the conditions are not favorable, helicopter support becomes vital. “If the banks are too steep, the trucks can’t get in there to drop off the bridge bays. In that case, we have to airlift them in,” explained 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Michael A. Spivack, platoon leader of 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon, 502<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Company.

When it comes to building a bridge, the vital ingredients are teamwork and synchronization. “It’s important to get the proper equipment at the right time. You have to get the ramp bays and the interior bays in the correct sequence for it to work,” said Spc. Travis G. Hammond, a bridge crewman with the 502<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Company.

Though the work is hard, it is satisfying, according to Hammond. “The most satisfying part of the job is the feedback from the soldiers crossing the river. There’s a look of wonder and enthusiasm in their eyes when they are actually driving across a bridge we just built,” said Hammond.



*Soldiers from the 502d Engineer Company lash together a raft during the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division’s river-crossing training on the Main River.*



*Sgt. John H. Reich and Pfc. Jered D. Wickman, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Air Defense Artillery Regiment, provide aerial security with their Avenger system during the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division’s river-crossing operations over the Main.*

